



US009257965B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Knoedgen et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,257,965 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Feb. 9, 2016**

(54) **VCC CHARGE AND FREE-WHEELING
DETECTION VIA SOURCE CONTROLLED
MOS TRANSISTOR**

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

(71) Applicant: **Dialog Semiconductor GmbH**,
Kirchheim/Teck-Nabern (DE)

6,643,144 B2 * 11/2003 Feldtkeller H02M 3/335
323/225

7,115,888 B2 * 10/2006 Hachiya H05B 33/0815
250/552

(72) Inventors: **Horst Knoedgen**, Munich (DE); **Julian
Tyrrell**, Swindon (GB)

2007/0070659 A1 * 3/2007 Sawtell H02M 3/33523
363/21.01

2008/0265133 A1 * 10/2008 Sawtell H02M 3/33523
250/206

(73) Assignee: **Dialog Semiconductor GmbH**,
Kirchheim/Teck-Nabern (DE)

2011/0260633 A1 * 10/2011 Takeda H05B 33/0815
315/192

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 265 days.

2013/0038242 A1 2/2013 Athalye

2014/0055174 A1 * 2/2014 Knoedgen H03K 17/163
327/109

2015/0311808 A1 * 10/2015 Shteynberg H05B 33/0815
315/307

(Continued)

(21) Appl. No.: **14/132,708**

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

(22) Filed: **Dec. 18, 2013**

European Search Report, 14157932.6-1802, Mailed: Aug. 6, 2014,
Diglog Semiconductor GmbH.

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2014/0375225 A1 Dec. 25, 2014

(Continued)

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Jun. 24, 2013 (EP) 13173450

Primary Examiner — Adam Houston

(74) Attorney, Agent, or Firm — Saile Ackerman LLC;
Stephen B. Ackerman

(51) **Int. Cl.**

H05B 37/00 (2006.01)

H05B 39/00 (2006.01)

H05B 41/14 (2006.01)

H03K 3/01 (2006.01)

H05B 33/08 (2006.01)

H02M 3/156 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **H03K 3/01** (2013.01); **H02M 3/156**
(2013.01); **H05B 33/0815** (2013.01); **Y02B**
20/346 (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

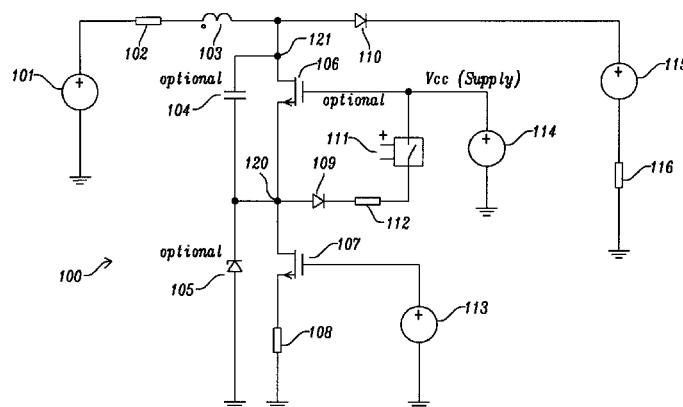
USPC 315/200 R, 46, 49, 171

See application file for complete search history.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A driver circuit using a power converter allows free-wheeling detection and/or provision of supply voltage. A circuit controls a switching state of a power switch. A first port of the switch is coupled to an inductor. The circuit is coupled to a control port of the switch wherein the control port of the switch is different from the first port of the switch. The circuit comprises a unit generating a signal for controlling the switching state of the switch wherein the signal is provided to the control port of the switch. Furthermore, the circuit comprises free-wheeling sensing means to detect an oscillation of a voltage at a measurement port of the switch wherein the measurement port of the switch is different from the first port of the switch and wherein the oscillation of the voltage at the measurement port indicates free-wheeling of the inductor.

24 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



(56)

References Cited

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

2015/0318787 A1* 11/2015 Chitta H05B 33/08
315/307
2015/0319817 A1* 11/2015 Gredler H05B 33/0845
315/224
2015/0319818 A1* 11/2015 Kahlman H05B 7/0209
315/201

European Search Report, 13173450.1-1802, Mailed: Nov. 27, 2013,
Dialog Semiconductor GmbH.
European Search Report 13173450.1-1802, Mailed: Mar. 18, 2014,
Dialog Semiconductor GmbH.

* cited by examiner

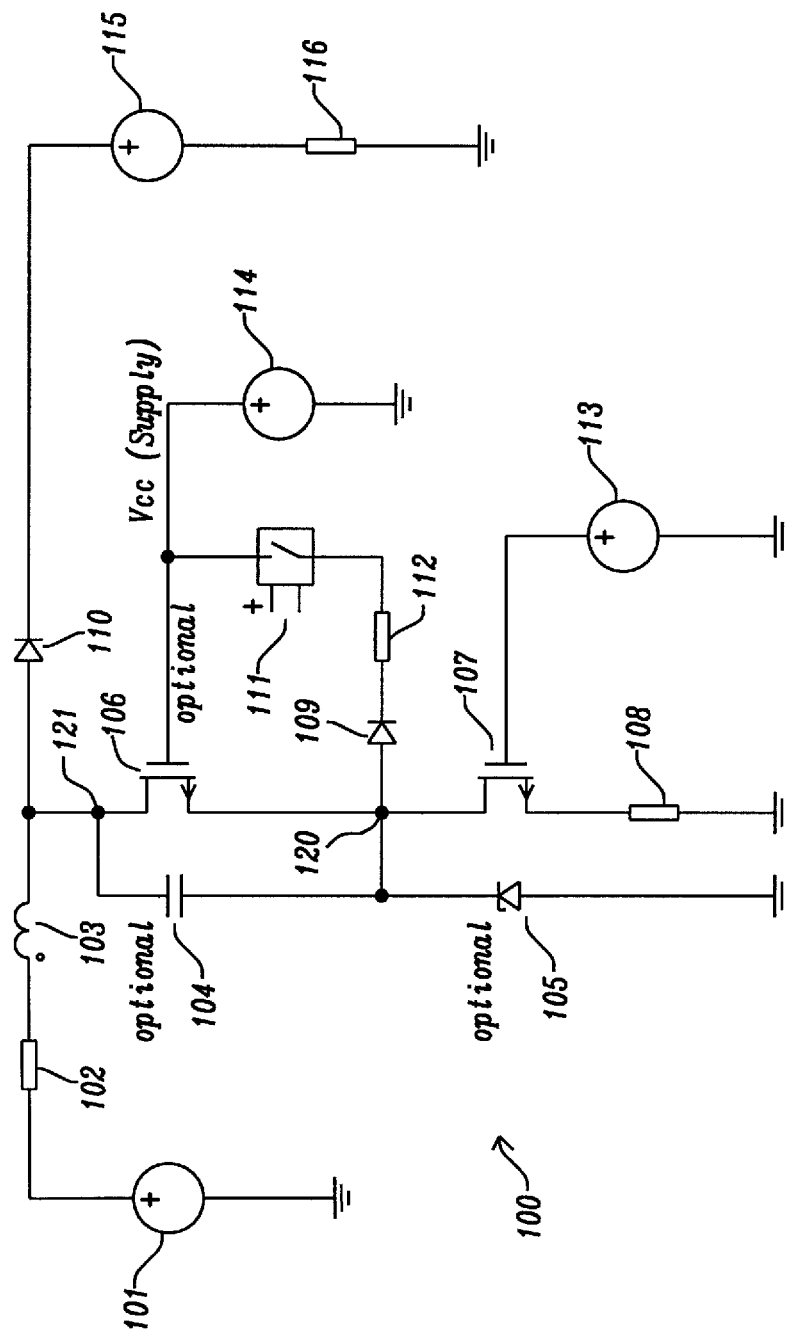
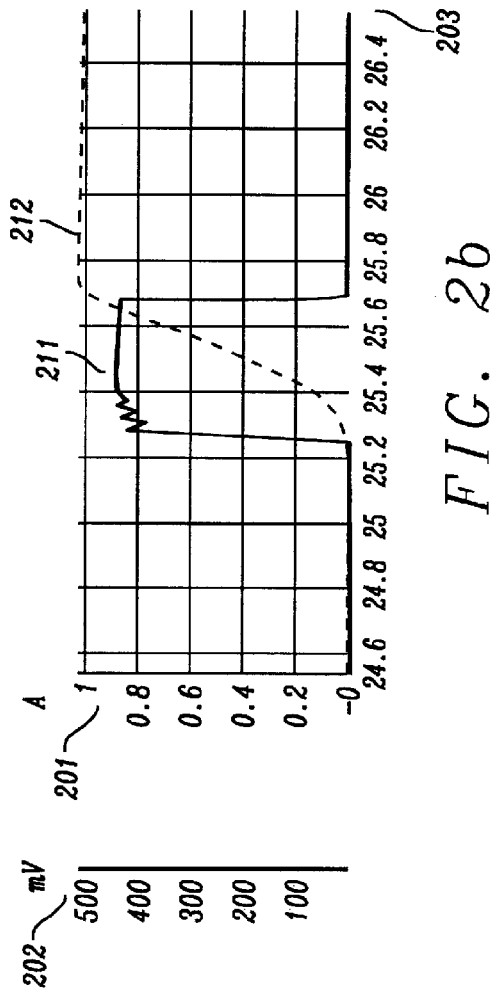
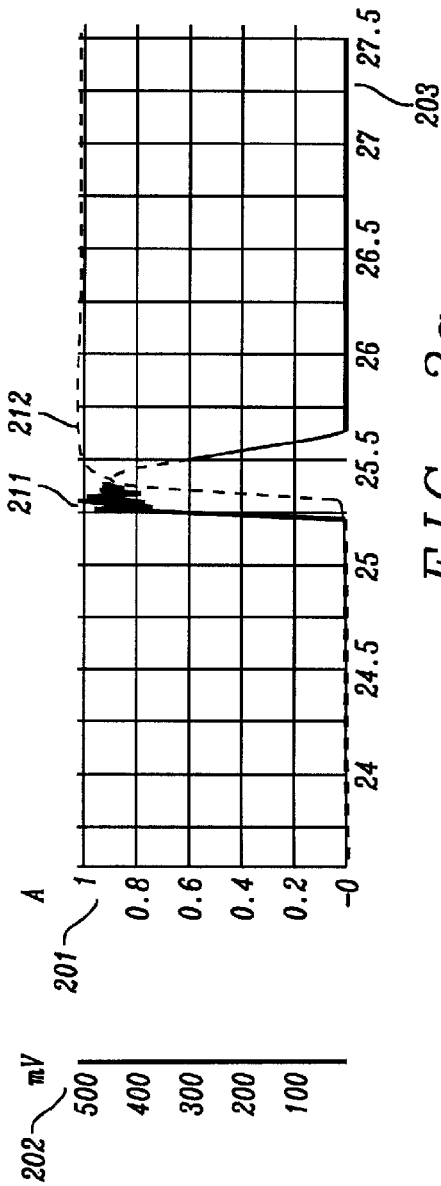
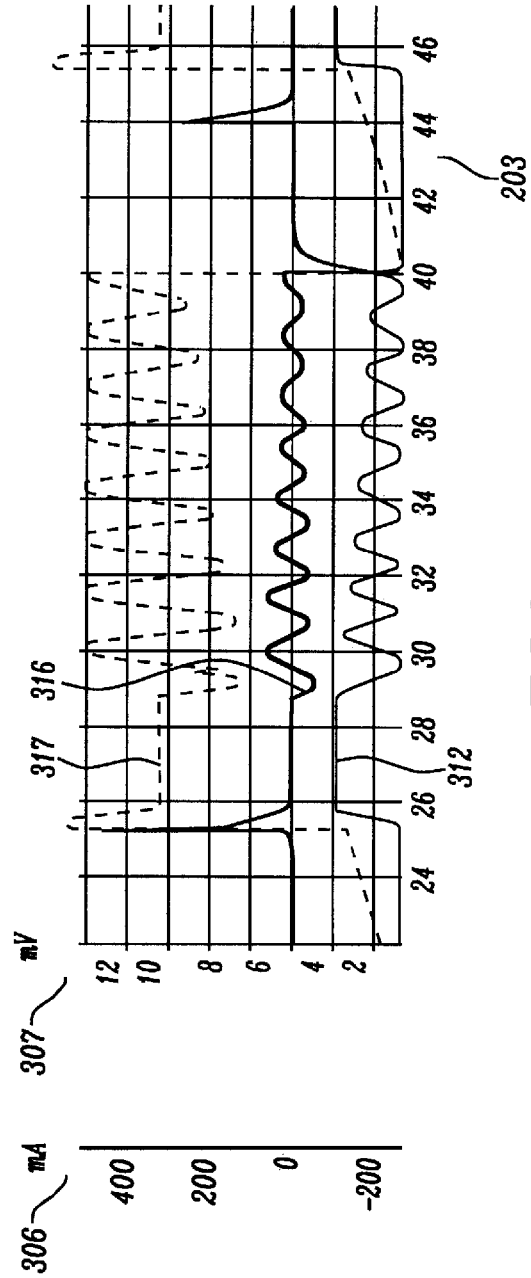
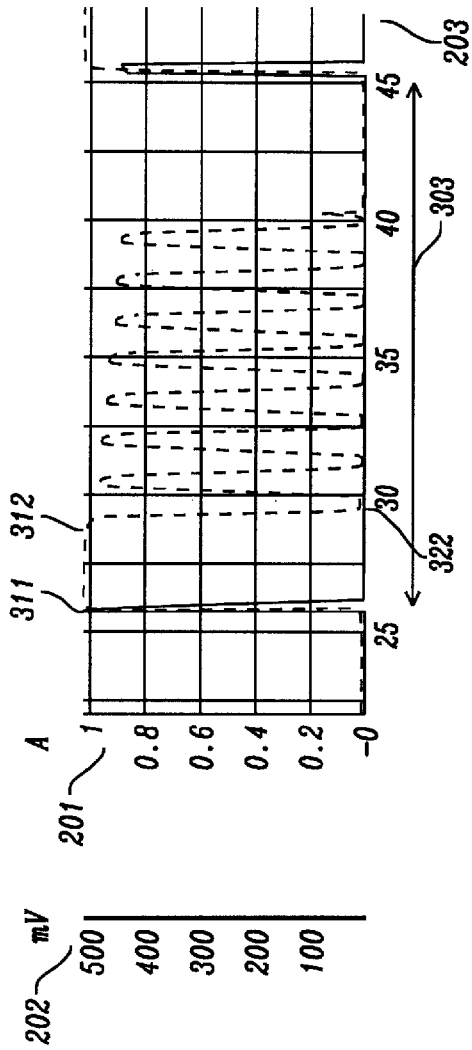


FIG. 1





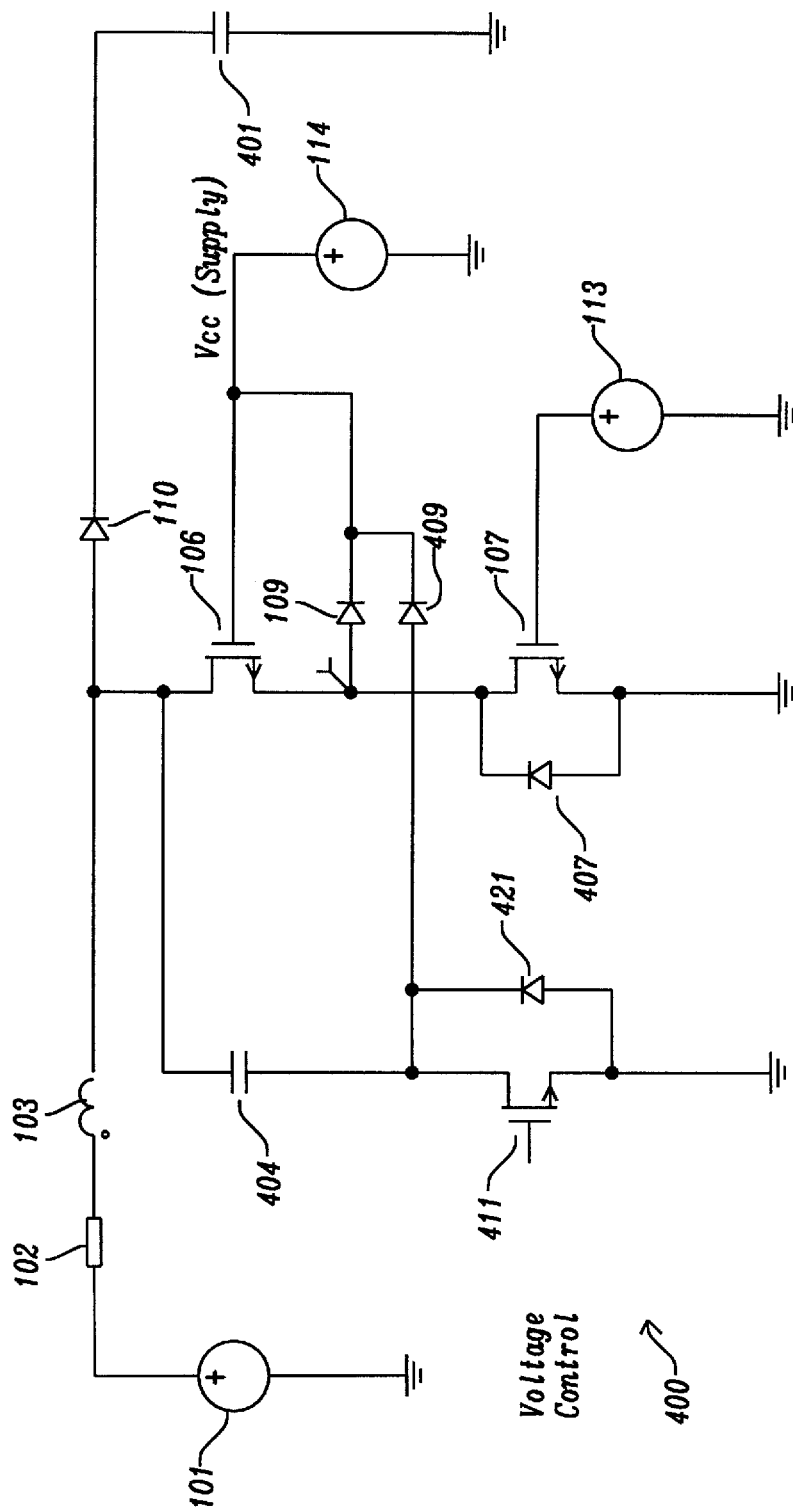


FIG. 4

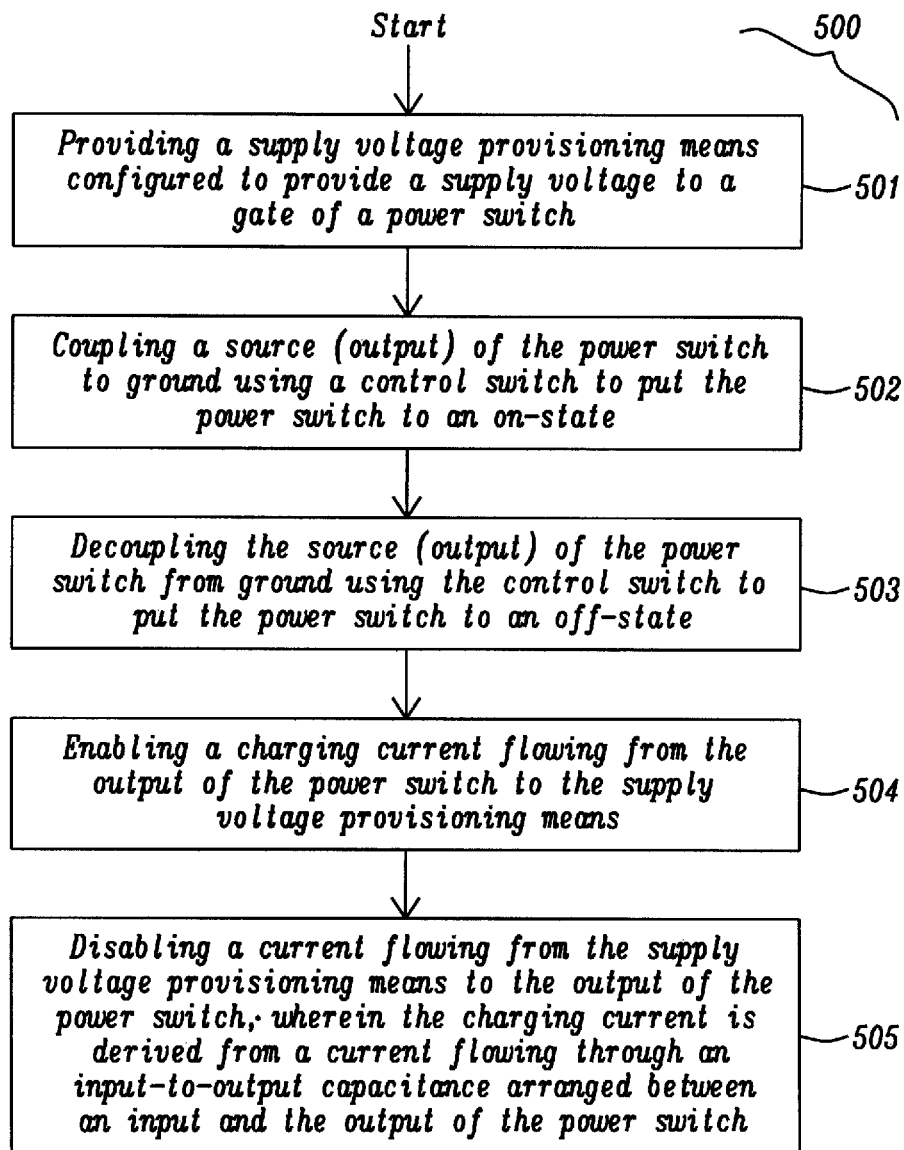


FIG. 5

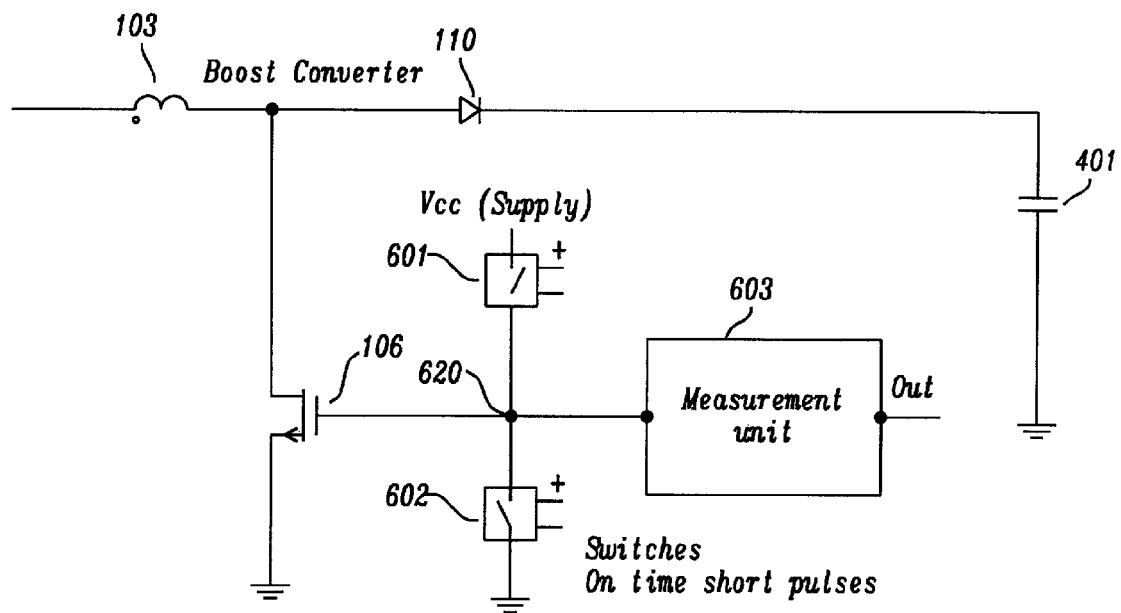


FIG. 6

1

VCC CHARGE AND FREE-WHEELING DETECTION VIA SOURCE CONTROLLED MOS TRANSISTOR

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present document relates to power converters. In particular, the present document relates to free-wheeling detection and/or to the provisioning of the supply voltage of a driver circuit using a switched-mode power converter.

BACKGROUND

It is typically desirable for a driver circuit (e.g. for the driver circuit of a Solid State Lighting (SSL) device, such as a Light Emitting Diode (LED)) to generate its own supply voltage from the switching converter comprised within the driver circuit and used e.g. to drive the SSL device. The generation of the supply voltage V_{cc} typically requires a number of external components, thereby increasing the cost of the driver circuit.

SUMMARY

A principal object of the present disclosure is for a driver circuit to generate its own supply from a switching converter comprised within the driver circuit

A further object of the disclosure is for a driver circuit to generate its own supply from a switching converter requiring a reduced number of external components.

A further object of the disclosure is to detect of “free-wheeling” or zero-crossing of the power converter.

A further object of the disclosure is to use a source-controlled power switch for generating the supply voltage and for the detection of the “free-wheeling” or zero-crossing of the power converter

A further object of the disclosure is to configure the primary power converter of a multi-stage power converter to provide the supply voltage V_{cc} for the complete driver circuit

A further object of the disclosure is to use a control circuit configured to control a switching state of a power switch.

In accordance with the objects of this disclosure a control circuit configured to control a switching state of a power switch; wherein a first port of the power switch is coupled to an inductor has been achieved. The control circuit disclosed is configured to be coupled to a control port of the power switch; wherein the control port of the power switch is different from the first port of the power switch. The control circuit comprises a control unit configured to generate a control signal for controlling the switching state of the power switch; wherein the control signal is to be provided to the control port of the power switch and a free-wheeling sensing means configured to detect a change of a voltage at a measurement port of the power switch; wherein the measurement port of the power switch is different from the first port of the power switch; and wherein the change of the voltage at the measurement port is indicative of free-wheeling of the inductor.

In accordance with the objects of this disclosure a method for re-charging supply voltage provisioning means and for controlling the switching state of a power switch has been achieved. The method disclosed firstly comprises the steps of: providing the supply voltage provisioning means configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of a power switch, coupling an output of the power switch to ground using a control switch, to put the power switch to an on-state; and decoupling the output of the power switch from ground using the control switch, to put the power switch to an off-state.

2

Furthermore the method comprises enabling a charging current flowing from the output of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means, and disabling a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means to the output of the power switch; wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through an input-to-output capacitance arranged between an input and the output of the power switch.

In the present document, a driver circuit is described, which is configured to generate the supply voltage V_{cc} using a reduced number of external components. In other words, a cost efficient driver circuit is described, which is configured to generate its own supply voltage. A primary power converter of the driver circuit may comprise a source controlled power switch (e.g. a metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor, MOSFET). This primary power converter may be configured to supply the supply voltage V_{cc} . The driver circuit may comprise a multi-stage power converter comprising a serial arrangement of power converters. The primary power converter of the multi-stage power converter may be configured to provide the supply voltage V_{cc} for the complete driver circuit.

The external power switch may be used as a switch for the primary power converter. Furthermore, the external power switch may be used as a current source as well as during start-up. Additionally, the source-controlled power switch may be used for generating the supply voltage and for the detection of the “free-wheeling” or zero-crossing of the power converter. The “free-wheeling” detection may also be possible using a grounded MOSFET configuration. The generation of the supply voltage may be enhanced using an additional charging capacitor.

According to an aspect, a control circuit (and a corresponding method) configured to control a switching state of a power switch (e.g. of a transistor) is described. A first port (also referred to as an input) of the power switch (e.g. a drain of the power switch) may (directly) be coupled to an inductor. The power switch and the inductor may be part of a switched-mode DC-DC power converter. The current through the inductor may correspond to the current through the power switch, when the power switch is in on-state.

The control circuit may be configured to be coupled to a control port of the power switch. The control port may correspond to a gate of the power switch (in case of a gate controlled power switch) or to a source of the power switch (in case of a source controlled power switch). The control port of the power switch is typically different from the first port of the power switch.

Furthermore, the control circuit may comprise a control unit configured to generate a control signal (e.g. a pulse width modulated signal) for controlling the switching state of the power switch. The control signal is to be provided to the control port of the power switch, in order to control the switching state of the power switch.

In addition, the control circuit may comprise free-wheeling sensing means (also referred to as a measurement unit) configured to detect a change of a voltage at a measurement port of the power switch. In particular, a change of voltage, which is greater than a pre-determined change threshold, may be detected. Alternatively or in addition, a change of voltage having an absolute gradient greater than a pre-determined gradient threshold may be detected. By way of example, an oscillation of the voltage at the measurement port of the power switch may be detected. The change of voltage may correspond to a beginning of the oscillation of the voltage. Alternatively or in addition, the free-wheeling sensing means may be configured to detect a zero-crossing of the voltage at

the measurement. Again, the zero-crossing may be an indicator of the beginning of the oscillation of the voltage at the measurement port.

The measurement port of the power switch may correspond to the gate and/or to the source of the power switch. The measurement port of the power switch may be different from the first port (e.g. the drain) of the power switch. The oscillation of the voltage at the measurement port may be indicative of free-wheeling of the inductor, notably at time instants when the power switch is in off-state. The control circuit may be configured to control the switching state of the power switch based on the detected oscillation (e.g. based on the detected change of voltage and/or based on the detected zero-crossing).

As indicated above, the control port and the measurement port may correspond to the gate of the power switch. The control circuit may comprise a low side control switch (which is to be) coupled to the gate of the power switch. The low side control switch may be configured to generate a pulsed off-signal by coupling the gate of the power switch to ground for a pulse duration (referred to in the present document as the second pulse duration) and (thereby) configured to put the power switch to the off-state. The gate of the power switch may be floating between an end of the pulsed off-signal and a beginning of the subsequence pulsed on-signal. The free-wheeling sensing means may be configured to detect the oscillation (e.g. the change and/or the zero-crossing) of the voltage at the gate of the power switch, when the gate of the power switch is floating, e.g. within the time interval between the end of the pulsed off-signal and the beginning of the subsequence pulsed on-signal.

The control port may correspond to a source (also referred to as an output) of the power switch. The control circuit may comprise a control switch configured to couple the source of the power switch to ground, when an input (e.g. the drain) of the control switch is coupled to the source of the power switch, in order to put the power switch to the on-state. The control circuit may also be configured to decouple the source of the power switch from ground, in order to put the power switch to the off-state. The free-wheeling sensing means may be configured to detect an oscillation (e.g. the change and/or zero-crossing) of a voltage at the gate or at the source of the power switch, when the power switch is in the off-state. Hence, the gate and/or the source of the power switch may correspond to the measurement port of the power switch.

Consequently, the drain-source capacitance of the power switch may be used to enable the measurement of free-wheeling of the inductor at the gate and/or the source of the power switch, thereby enabling the measurement of free-wheeling at low voltage levels.

The control circuit may further comprise a first charging capacitor arranged in parallel to the drain-source capacitance of the power switch and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the first port (e.g. the drain) of the power switch. The first port may correspond to a port of the inductor. By using the first charging capacitor, the reliability for measuring free-wheeling at the source of the power switch may be improved. The control circuit may further comprise a Zener diode configured to couple the first charging capacitor to ground, in order to allow a current through the first charging capacitor to flow off.

According to a further aspect, a control circuit configured to re-charge supply voltage provisioning means and/or configured to control the switching state of a power switch is described. The power switch may comprise (or may be) a transistor, such as a MOSFET, e.g. an NMOS transistor. The control circuit may be implemented as or may be part of an

integrated circuit. The power switch may be external to the integrated circuit. Typically, the control circuit is used in conjunction with a power converter, notably a switched-mode power converter comprising the power switch. The power switch of the power converter may be controlled by the control circuit.

The supply voltage provisioning means may be configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of the power switch, e.g. when the supply voltage provisioning means are coupled to the gate of the power switch. The supply voltage provisioning means may comprise a supply voltage capacitor. The control circuit may be configured to provide electrical energy to the supply voltage provisioning means (e.g. to recharge the supply voltage capacitor). Typically, the electrical energy which is provided to the supply voltage provisioning means is derived from the electrical energy which is converted by the power converter comprising the power switch. In other words, the electrical energy which is provided to the supply voltage provisioning means may be derived from the electrical energy available at the input of the power converter.

The control circuit may comprise a control switch which is configured to couple an output of the power switch (e.g. the source of the power switch) to ground, when an input of the control switch (e.g. the drain of the control switch) is coupled to the output of the power switch. By doing this, the power switch may be put to an on-state. On the other hand, the control switch may be configured to decouple the output of the power switch from ground, to put the power switch to an off-state. As such, the control circuit may be configured to source control the power switch using the control switch. The control switch may comprise a transistor, such as a MOSFET, e.g. an NMOS transistor.

Furthermore, the control circuit may comprise charging circuitry (also referred to as a charging path) configured to enable a charging current flowing from the output of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to disable a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means to the output of the power switch. In particular, this may be achieved when an input of the charging circuitry is coupled to the output of the power switch and when an output of the charging circuitry is coupled to the gate of the power switch and to the supply voltage provisioning means.

The charging current may be derived from a current flowing through a drain-to-source capacitance (also referred to as an input-to-output capacitance) arranged between an input and the output of the power switch. The input of the power switch may correspond to the drain and the output of the power switch may correspond to the source of the power switch. The current flowing through the drain-to-source capacitance may be induced by a change of the voltage at the input of the power switch. This change of the voltage may be caused by the transition of the power switch from the on-state to the off-state. The drain-to-source capacitance may comprise a drain-source capacitance of the power switch (e.g. of the MOSFET). Alternatively or in addition, the drain-to-source capacitance may comprise a charging capacitance arranged in parallel to the power switch.

As such, the control circuit may be configured to provide electrical energy to the supply voltage provisioning means using the power switch, e.g. the power switch of a switched-mode power converter. By doing this, no further external components (i.e. components which are external to the integrated circuit of the control circuit and/or of the power converter) are required, thereby reducing the cost of the control circuit and/or of the power converter.

5

The charging circuitry may comprise a charging diode configured to let pass the charging current from the output of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the output of the power switch. Furthermore, the charging circuitry may comprise a first charging switch configured to block and/or to let pass a current between the supply voltage provisioning means and the output of the power switch. In addition, the charging circuitry may comprise first control means which are configured to open and/or close the first charging switch in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means. In particular, the first control means may be configured to control the first charging switch, such that the supply voltage is maintained within a pre-determined voltage interval. In other words, the first control means may be configured to regulate the supply voltage using the first charging switch.

As indicated above, the control circuit may comprise a first charging capacitor arranged in parallel to a drain-source capacitance (also referred to as an input-output capacitance) of the power switch and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the input of the power switch. As such, the overall input-to-output capacitance may comprise the input-output capacitance of the power switch and the capacitance of the additional first charging capacitor. By providing an additional first charging capacitor, the charging current (available for re-charging the supply voltage provisioning means) may be increased.

The control circuit may further comprise a Zener diode configured to couple the first charging capacitor and/or the drain-source capacitance of the power switch to ground. As such, the charging current provided by the input-to-output capacitance may flow off to ground, e.g. when the first charging switch is switched off.

The control circuit may further comprise a second charging capacitor arranged in parallel to the serially arranged power switch and charging circuitry. The second charging capacitor may be configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the input of the power switch. In addition, the control circuit may comprise a second charging diode configured to let pass a second charging current from the second charging capacitor to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the second charging capacitor. As such, a second charging path for maintaining the supply voltage may be provided.

The control circuit may comprise a second charging switch configured to couple the charging capacitor to ground, when the second charging switch is in on-state. As such, the current which is provided by the second charging capacitor may flow off to ground, when the second charging switch is in on-state. The control circuit may comprise second control means configured to open and/or close the second charging switch in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means. The second control means may be configured to regulate the supply voltage using the second charging switch. The first and second charging switches may comprise transistors, e.g. MOSFETs.

According to another aspect, a power converter is described. The power converter may be configured to provide at its output electrical energy at an output voltage derived from electrical energy at an input voltage available at an input of the power converter. The power converter may comprise one or more of: a buck converter, a boost converter, a buck-boost converter, a flyback converter, and/or a single-ended primary-inductor converter.

6

The power converter may comprise a power switch configured to commutate between an on-state and an off-state. Furthermore, the power converter may comprise a control circuit as described in the present document. The control unit may be configured to control the switching state of the power switch. In addition, the power converter may comprise an inductor configured to store electrical energy, when the power switch is in on-state, and configured to release electrical energy, when the power switch is in off-state. In particular, the inductor may be configured to draw electrical energy from the input of the power converter, when the power switch is in on-state and configured to provide electrical energy to the output of the power converter, when the power switch is in off-state.

The power converter may further comprise free-wheeling sensing means configured to detect an oscillation (e.g. a change and/or a zero-crossing) of a voltage at a gate of the power switch, at a gate of the control switch, and/or at an output (e.g. the source) of the control switch. The power switch and/or the control switch may comprise (or may correspond to) a metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor. Alternatively or in addition, the power switch and/or the control switch may exhibit a drain-source capacitance, a drain-gate capacitance and/or a source-gate capacitance. As a result of such parasitic capacitances, an oscillation (e.g. a change and/or a zero-crossing) of the voltage at the input of the power switch may be coupled to the output and/or the gate of the power switch, and from the output of the power switch to the output of the control switch and/or the gate of the control switch. As a result of this, the oscillation (e.g. a change and/or a zero-crossing) may be detected at reduced voltage levels at the gate of the power switch, at the gate of the control switch, and/or at the output of the control switch, thereby simplifying the detection of free-wheeling of the inductor.

The control circuit may be configured to control the switching state of the power switch based on the detected oscillation (e.g. a change and/or a zero-crossing). In particular, the control circuit may be configured to detect a first minimum or maximum of the detected oscillation (also referred to herein as a zero-crossing). The time instant of such a first minimum or maximum may be used as an indication of the start of free-wheeling. As such, the control circuit may be configured to control the power converter in a boundary or discontinuous conduction mode. The boundary conduction mode may be such that the power switch is switched on at the time instant, when the inductor is free of electrical energy, i.e. when the inductor starts free-wheeling.

According to a further aspect, a driver circuit, e.g. for a solid state lighting device, is described. The driver circuit may comprise a rectifier configured to provide a DC (direct current) voltage from an AC (alternating current) mains voltage. Furthermore, the driver circuit may comprise a power converter as described in the present document. The driver circuit may be configured to provide a drive current at a drive voltage (e.g. for the solid state lighting device), derived from electrical energy at the DC voltage.

According to another aspect, a method for re-charging supply voltage provisioning means and/or for controlling the switching state of a power switch is described. The method may comprise coupling an output (e.g. the source) of the power switch to ground using a control switch, in order to put the power switch to an on-state. Furthermore, the method may comprise decoupling the output of the power switch from ground using the control switch, in order to put the power switch to an off-state. In addition, the method may comprise enabling a charging current flowing from the output of the

power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means. The charging current may be derived from a current flowing through an input-to-output capacitance (e.g. drain-to-source capacitance) arranged between an input (e.g. the drain) and the output of the power switch. Such a current may flow subject to a change of (e.g. a gradient of) the voltage at the input of the power switch. In addition, the method may comprise disabling a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means to the output of the power switch, thereby preventing a discharging of the supply voltage provisioning means.

According to a further aspect, a software program is described. The software program may be adapted for execution on a processor and for performing the method steps outlined in the present document when carried out on the processor.

According to another aspect, a storage medium is described. The storage medium may comprise a software program adapted for execution on a processor and for performing the method steps outlined in the present document when carried out on the processor.

According to a further aspect, a computer program product is described. The computer program may comprise executable instructions for performing the method steps outlined in the present document when executed on a computer.

It should be noted that the methods and systems including its preferred embodiments as outlined in the present document may be used stand-alone or in combination with the other methods and systems disclosed in this document. In addition, the features outlined in the context of a system are also applicable to a corresponding method. Furthermore, all aspects of the methods and systems outlined in the present document may be arbitrarily combined. In particular, the features of the claims may be combined with one another in an arbitrary manner.

In the present document, the term “couple” or “coupled” refers to elements being in electrical communication with each other, whether directly connected e.g., via wires, or in some other manner.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is explained below in an exemplary manner with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of an example power converter comprising circuitry for maintaining the supply voltage of a power switch of the power converter;

FIGS. 2a and 2b shows example charging currents and drain voltages at the power switch of the power converter;

FIGS. 3a and 3b shows example oscillating signals caused by free-wheeling of an inductor of the power converter;

FIG. 4 shows a block diagram of an example power converter comprising further circuitry for maintaining the supply voltage;

FIG. 5 shows a flow chart of an example method for maintaining the supply voltage of the power switch of a power converter; and

FIG. 6 shows a block diagram of an example measurement circuit for measuring free wheeling.

DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of an example power converter 100 comprising a source controlled power switch 106. The power switch 106 may be external to the integrated circuit of the power converter 100 (also referred to as the power converter network) and/or of the driver circuit com-

prising the power converter 100. The power switch 106 may comprise a transistor, e.g. a field effect transistor (FET) such as a metal oxide semiconductor FET (MOSFET). An input voltage 101 is provided at the input of the power converter. The input voltage 101 may be derived for a mains voltage (using e.g. a rectifier). The power converter 100 may comprise a resistor 102. Furthermore, the power converter 100 typically comprises an inductor 103 (coupled to a drain 121 of the power switch 106) for storing electrical energy which is to be transferred from the input of the power converter 100 to a load 116 at an output of the power converter 100. The electrical energy at the output of the power converter 100 may be provided at an output voltage 115.

The power switch 106 may commute between an on-state (also referred to as a closed state) and an off-state (also referred to as an open state). During the on-state, a current (corresponding to the inductor current through the inductor 103) is flowing through the power switch 106, thereby storing electrical energy within the inductor 103. On the other hand, during the off-state, the energy stored within the inductor 103 is provided to the output of the power converter via a converter diode 110.

The state of the power switch 106 may be controlled via the potential (or voltage level) of the source 120 of the power switch 106. In other words, the power switch 106 may be source controlled. This is illustrated in FIG. 1. A control switch 107 (e.g. a MOSFET) may be used to control the state of the power switch 106. The control switch 107 may be part of a control unit. A gate of the power switch 106 may be maintained at a supply voltage V_{CC} provided by supply voltage provisioning means 114. The supply voltage provisioning means 114 may comprise e.g. a capacitor. The state of the power switch 106 may be controlled by controlling the gate-source voltage V_{GS} between the gate and the source of the power switch 106. In FIG. 1 the source of the power switch 106 corresponds to the mid-point between the power switch 106 and the control switch 107. Typically, the power switch 106 is put into the on-state if the gate-source voltage V_{GS} exceeds a threshold voltage V_T of the power switch 106. On the other hand, the power switch 106 may be put into the off-state by reducing the gate-source voltage V_{GS} below the threshold voltage V_T .

The gate-source voltage V_{GS} of the power switch 106 may be controlled using the control switch 107. When putting the control switch 107 into the on-state (using the gate control voltage 113 for the control switch 107), the source of the power switch 106 is coupled to ground (e.g. via an optional shunt resistor 108). As a result of this, the gate-source voltage V_{GS} is increased, e.g. up to the supply voltage V_{CC} , i.e. up to the gate voltage which is applied to the gate of the power switch 106. On the other hand, by putting the control switch 107 into the off-state, the potential of the source of the power switch 106 is increased (e.g. up to the gate control voltage 113 of the control switch 107). As a result of this, the gate-source voltage V_{GS} is reduced (e.g. by a voltage corresponding to the gate control voltage 113). The supply voltage V_{CC} and/or the gate control signal 113 may be selected such that if the control switch 107 is in on-state, the gate-source voltage V_{GS} exceeds the threshold voltage V_T , and such that if the control switch 107 is in off-state, the gate-source voltage V_{GS} is below the threshold voltage V_T . As such, the control switch 107 may be used to control the state of the power switch 106.

In other words, the power switch 106 may be controlled by the conduction state of the control switch 107. If the control switch 107 is on, the coil or inductor current (i.e. the current through the inductor 103) appears in the control switch 107 and in the power switch 106. Switching off the control switch

107 stops the ramp-up current in the inductor 103, which causes the voltage at the drain of the power switch 106 (i.e. at the mid-point between inductor 103 and power switch 107) to go positive until the converter diode 110 conducts, whilst the magnetic field within the inductor 103 collapses. As such, the opening of the control switch 107 leads to a change of the drain-source voltage across the power switch 106.

The power switch 106 may be used to limit the voltage across the control switch 107, when the power switch 106 and the control switch 107 are in off-state. However, typically a current flows from the drain of the power switch 106 via a parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 to the drain of control switch 107 (which corresponds to the source of the power switch 106). The amount of current flowing across the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 typically depends on the change of the drain-source voltage across the power switch 106 (due to the closing of the power switch 106). Furthermore, the amount of current flowing across the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 typically depends on the size of the drain-source capacitance.

The current flowing via the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 may be used to charge the supply voltage provisioning means 114, thereby enabling the power converter 100 to generate and/or maintain its own supply voltage Vcc.

In particular, a charging diode 109 may be used to direct the current flowing via the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 to the supply voltage provisioning means 114, thereby allowing the supply voltage to be recharged. The charging diode 109 may be configured to couple a mid-point between the (source of) the power switch 106 and the (drain of) the control switch 107 to the supply voltage provisioning means 114. Furthermore, the charging diode 109 may be configured to conduct a current from the mid-point between the (source of) the power switch 106 and the (drain of) the control switch 107 towards the supply voltage provisioning means 114, and to block a current in the inverse direction. As such, the charging diode 109 may be configured to prevent a discharging of the supply voltage provisioning means 114 (notably when the control switch 107 is in on-state).

Furthermore, an optional charging switch 111 may be provided which may be used to control the charging and/or the voltage level of the supply voltage provisioning means 114. The charging switch 111 may be controlled to regulate the supply voltage Vcc provided by the supply voltage provisioning means 114.

In order to enhance the effect provided by the drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106, an optional charging capacitor 104 may be provided. The charging capacitor 104 may be arranged in parallel to the power switch 106. In particular, the charging capacitor 104 may be arranged in parallel to the drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106, thereby increasing the overall capacitance and thereby increasing the current flowing from the drain of the power switch 106 to the source of the power switch 106, when the power switch 106 is in off-state (and when the drain-source voltage across the power switch 106 changes).

Furthermore, an optional Zener diode 105 may be provided. The Zener diode 105 may be used to conduct the current flowing across the charging capacitor 104 and/or across the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 to ground, when this current is not used to recharge the supply voltage provisioning means 114 (e.g. when the charging switch 111 is closed).

Alternatively or in addition, a shunt regulator (comprising e.g. a Zener diode) may be provided at the supply voltage provisioning means 114 in order to regulate the supply voltage Vcc, e.g. if the optional charging switch 111 and the Zener diode 105 are not used.

As such, the power converter 100 may be configured to maintain the supply voltage Vcc used to control the power switch 106. The charging path for the supply voltage may comprise a charging diode 109 and a charging switch 111. Furthermore, the charging path may comprise a charging resistor 112, e.g. to limit the amount of current flowing towards the supply voltage provisioning means 114.

At the time instant when all of the energy stored within the inductor 103 has been transferred to the output of the power converter 100 (via the converter diode 110) the drain voltage of the power switch 106 typically starts to oscillate. The frequency of the oscillation typically depends on the inductance (influenced by the inductance of the inductor 103) and capacitance (influenced by the drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106 and by the capacitance of the charging capacitor 104) at this node (i.e. at the drain of the power switch 106). This effect may be referred to as the 'free-wheeling' effect. The zero-crossing of the oscillating waveform may be used to determine the completion of the energy transfer from the inductor 103 towards the output of the power converter. This means that by detecting the zero-crossing of the oscillating waveform, the power converter 100 may be operated in a so called boundary or discontinuous conduction mode. In particular, the detected zero-crossing of the oscillating waveform may be used as an indication for the fact that the inductor 103 is free of energy, and that the power switch 106 may be switched into the on-state, in order to recharge the inductor 103 with energy drawn from the input of the power converter 100.

FIGS. 2a and 2b illustrate the Vcc charging current during the switch-off transition of the power converter 100, i.e. during the transition from the on-state of the power switch 106 to the off-state of the power switch 106. FIG. 2a shows the drain voltage 202, 212 at the drain node of the power switch 106 along the time line 203. Furthermore, FIG. 2a shows the charging current 201, 211 through the drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106. The charging current 201, 211 is shown for a typical MOSFET 106 comprising a drain-source capacitance of a pre-determined capacitance value. It can be seen that while the drain voltage 202, 212 increases (due to the closing of the power switch 106), a charging current 201, 211 flows through the drain-source capacitance of the power switch 106. This charging current 201, 211 may be used to charge the supply voltage provisioning means 114, e.g. using the charging path illustrated in FIG. 1. FIG. 2b shows the charging current 201, 211 for the case where a charging capacitor 104 (of 500 pF) is arranged in parallel to the power switch 106, in order to increase the charging current 201, 211.

FIG. 3a shows the complete waveform of the power converter 100 for a complete commutation cycle 303. It can be seen that the charging current 201, 311 flows during the initial phase, when the power switch 106 is commutated from the on-state to the off-state, i.e. when the drain voltage 202, 312 of the power switch 106 goes from substantially 0V to a relatively high voltage (comprising the input voltage 101 of the power converter 100 and the voltage drop at the inductor 103). After some time, the energy stored within the inductor 103 has been provided to the output of the power converter 100 and the inductor 103 goes into "free-wheeling". As outlined above, the "free-wheeling" of the inductor 103 typically leads to an oscillation of the drain voltage 202, 312 at the

11

drain of the power switch **106** (as can be seen in FIG. **3a**). In particular a first zero-crossing **322** of the drain voltage **202**, **312** occurs once the stored energy of the inductor **103** has been transferred to the output of the power converter **100**. As such, the zero-crossing **322** may be used to control the switching of the power switch **106** (via the control switch **107**).

The charging current **201**, **311** is typically dependent on the rise time of the control switch **107**, which impacts the gradient of the drain voltage **201**, **312** and by consequence the amount of charging current **201**, **311** (via the formula $I=C \cdot dV/dt$, wherein dV/dt is the gradient of the drain voltage **201**, **312**, C is the capacitance between the drain and the source of the power switch **106**, and I is the charging current **201**, **311**). As such, the charging current **201**, **311** also depends on the capacitance C between drain and source. The capacitance C between the drain and the source may comprise the parasitic drain-source capacitance of the power switch **106** and one or more optional external charging capacitors **104**.

The drain voltage **202**, **312** at the power switch **106** typically starts to oscillate once the converter diode **110** does no longer conduct. In particular, once the inductor **103** is free of energy, the converter diode **110** no longer conducts and the capacitance of the power switch **106** and/or the charging capacitor **104** form a resonant circuit in conjunction with the inductor **103**. The oscillations of the resonant circuit may be measured as oscillations of the drain voltage **202**, **312** of the power switch **106**.

It should be noted that a similar oscillating signal can be seen at the source of the control switch **107** (via the drain-source capacitive coupling of the power switch **106** and the control switch **107**). As such, the oscillating signal may be measured as the voltage drop across the shunt resistor **108**. In a similar manner, the oscillating signal may be seen at the gate of the power switch **106** and/or at the gate of the control switch **107** by the drain-gate and/or source-gate capacitive coupling. As such, the oscillating signal (and in particular the first zero-crossing) may be measured at the gates of the power switch **106** and/or the control switch **107**. In particular, the oscillating signal may be measured at the level of the supply voltage V_{cc} , thereby simplifying the detection of the time instant of the first zero-crossing **322**.

FIG. **3b** illustrates the coupling effect of the switching waveform and the 'free-wheeling' oscillation of the drain voltage **202**. The capacitive coupling of the power switch **106** allows the transfer of information from the drain to the source and the gate terminals of the power switch **106** via the parasitic capacitance (and optional additional charging capacitors). This allows the high-voltage modulation of the drain voltage **202** to be detected and/or measured within the supply voltage range of the driving circuitry. As such, this allows to substantially simplifying the measurement of the first zero-crossing of the drain voltage **202**.

One technique to sense the free-wheeling voltage could use the control switch **107** as a current source to determine the source voltage of the power switch **106**. This load would typically be turned on after the capacitive charging of the supply voltage provisioning means **114** on the rising edge of the drain voltage **202**. By using a cascaded structure the source of the power switch **106** modulates the gate and the source. In order to enable an improved measurement of the modulated signal, it may be beneficial to use the control switch **107** as a pull down (e.g. as current source).

FIG. **3b** illustrates the voltage **307**, **317** at the source/drain node between the power switch **106** and the control switch **107**. Furthermore, FIG. **3b** illustrates a scaled version of the drain voltage **312**. In addition, FIG. **3b** illustrates the gate current **306**, **316** at the gate of the power switch **106**. It can be

12

seen that the oscillating signal is present in all of these signals, thereby enabling the detection of the first zero-crossing at the level of the supply voltage V_{cc} .

FIG. **4** shows a block diagram of another power converter **400** comprising further circuitry configured for charging the supply voltage of the power switch **106**. The circuit arrangement of FIG. **4** may be beneficial to reduce the dissipated heat of the regulation circuitry (e.g. the charging switch **111**) used to regulate the transfer of the charging current to the supply voltage provisioning means **114**. In the power converter **400** a charging switch **411** is used. The charging switch **411** is coupled to ground. Furthermore, a separate charging capacitor **404** may be used to regulate the supply voltage V_{cc} . The charging capacitor **404** is coupled to the supply voltage provisioning means **114** via a second charging diode **409**. When the charging switch **411** is in off-state, the charging current via the charging capacitor **404** is passed to the supply voltage provisioning means **114** for recharging or maintaining of the supply voltage V_{cc} . On the other hand, when the charging switch **411** is in on-state, the charging current flows to ground. As such, the charging switch **411** may be used to regulate the supply voltage V_{cc} .

In other words, the inherent drain-bulk diode **421** (commonly called the bulk diode) of the charging switch **411** forms a rectifier for the signal across the charging capacitor **404**. The same applies to the bulk diode **407** of the control switch **107**, which forms rectifier for the signal across the drain-source capacitance of the power switch **106**. The component values of the charging capacitor **404** and of the drain-source capacitance of the power switch **106** may be selected such that a majority of the charging current for the supply voltage is provided via the charging capacitor **404**, thereby allowing for an increased control of the regulation of the supply voltage V_{cc} using the control switch **411**. By way of example, the charging capacitor **404** may be designed such that 50% or more, 60% or more, 70% or more, 80% or more, 90% or more of the charging current to the supply voltage provisioning means **114** is provided by the charging capacitor **404**.

The regulation of the supply voltage typically causes the charging switch **411** (e.g. a transistor) to be switched on such that the current through the charging capacitor **404** flows to ground. This current to ground usually does not significantly heat up the charging switch **411**, because the charging switch **411** may be turned on with a low resistance (by using e.g. an N-type MOSFET as the charging switch **411**). As such, the circuit arrangement of FIG. **4** may be used to regulate the supply voltage V_{cc} with low heat dissipation.

It should be noted that the charging capacitor **404** may also be used as a snubber capacitor, in order to help eliminate high-frequency ringing of the power switch **106**. As such, the charging capacitor **404** may be used for additional purposes, in addition to the recharging of the supply voltage provisioning means **114**.

A rise and/or fall-time switching control of the control switch **107** may be used to reduce the slew rate of the drain voltage **202**. On the other hand, the reduced slew rate may stress the power switch **106** during the transition from the on-state to the off-state (because the power switch **106** is concurrently submitted to a relatively high current and a relatively high voltage). This may increase the dissipated power within the power switch **106**.

Overall, the design and selection of the components of the power converter **100**, **400** may be used to decide whether to make use of an additional charging capacitor **104**, **404** in order to avoid hot switching and dissipation of the power switch **106** and/or whether to make use of the drain-source capacitance a power switch **106** which can handle hot switch-

13

ing and heat dissipation. The control of the slew rate of the drain voltage may be beneficial to minimize the EMI (electromagnetic interference) radiated from the power converter 100, 400. The design of the power converter 100, 400 may take into account one or more of the following aspects: Frequency of switching of the power switch 106, possible operating region stress in the power switch 106, EMI, voltage range, current range, peak power dissipation in the power switch, and/or ringing of parasitic inductors.

FIG. 5 shows a flow chart of an example method 500 for re-charging supply voltage provisioning means 114 and/or for controlling the switching state of a power switch 106. As outlined above, step 501 describes providing the supply voltage provisioning means 114 configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of the power switch 106. In step 502 the method 500 describes coupling a source (output) of the power switch 106 to ground using a control switch 107. By coupling the source of the power switch 106 to ground, the power switch 106 may be put to an on-state. Furthermore, in step 503 the method 500 depicts decoupling the source (output) of the power switch 106 from ground using the control switch 107. By doing this, the power switch 106 may be put to an off-state.

In addition, in step 504 the method 500 illustrates enabling a charging current flowing from the source of the power switch 106 to the supply voltage provisioning means 114. The charging current may be derived from a current flowing through a drain-to-source capacitance arranged between a drain and the source of the power switch. In particular, the charging current may be enabled during the transition from an on-state to an off-state of the power switch 106. In other words, the charging current may be provided to the supply voltage provisioning means 114, during a time interval within which the voltage at the drain of the power switch changes (e.g. increases). In particular, the charging current may be provided during a time interval within which the voltage change exhibits a gradient which is equal to or greater than a pre-determined gradient threshold.

Furthermore, in step 505 the method may comprise disabling a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means 114 to the source of the power switch 106. Such a reverse current from the supply voltage provisioning means 114 to the source of the power switch 106 may be disabled at any time (e.g. using a charging diode 109).

In the present document, it has been proposed to make use of the coupling provided by the drain-to-gate capacitance, the gate-to-source capacitance and/or the drain-to-source capacitance of a power switch 106 to measure free-wheeling e.g. at the gate of the power switch 106, i.e. to measure free-wheeling at a reduced voltage level (e.g. at the level of the supply voltage V_{cc}). As such, a measurement circuit has been described, which is configured to measure oscillations 316 at the gate of the power switch 106, while the power switch 106 is in off-state. These oscillations 316 (in particular the first zero-crossing of the gate voltage) are an indication of free-wheeling of the inductor 103.

FIG. 6 shows a block diagram of an example measurement circuit for measuring free-wheeling. In the illustrated example, the power switch 106 is controlled via the gate 620 of the power switch 106. A high side control switch 601 may be used to couple the gate of the power switch 106 to the supply voltage V_{cc} , in order to put the power switch 106 to the on-state. A low side control switch 602 may be used to couple the gate of the power switch 106 to ground, in order to put the power switch 106 to the off-state. The high side control switch 601 and the low side control switch 602 may be MOS-FETs. The high side control switch 601 and the low side control switch 602 may be operated in a pulsed manner. The

14

high side control switch 601 and the low side control switch 602 may be part of a control unit of the control circuit.

In particular, the high side control switch 601 may be coupled to the control pin (e.g. the gate) of the power switch 106 and may be configured to generate a pulsed on-signal by coupling the control pin to a supply voltage for a first pulse duration, thereby putting the power switch 106 to the on-state. The control pin may float at a time instant subsequent to the first pulse duration. The low side control switch 602 may be coupled to the control pin of the power switch 106 and may be configured to generate a pulsed off-signal by coupling the control pin to ground for a second pulse duration, thereby putting the power switch 106 to the off-state. The control pin may float between an end of the pulsed on-signal and a beginning of the subsequent pulsed off-signal. Furthermore, the control pin may float between an end of the pulsed off-signal and a beginning of the subsequent pulsed on-signal. A ratio of the first pulse duration and a duration between a beginning of the pulsed on-signal and a beginning of the subsequent pulsed off-signal may be less than 50%, less than 30%, less than 20%, less than 10%, or less than 5%. In a similar manner, a ratio of the second pulse duration and a duration between a beginning of the pulsed off-signal and a beginning of the subsequent pulsed on-signal may be less than 50%, less than 30%, less than 20%, less than 10%, or less than 5%.

A control circuit may be used and may be configured to generate a gate control signal comprising a sequence of alternating pulsed on-signals and pulsed off-signals, thereby operating the power switch 106 in alternating on-states and off-states, respectively.

FIG. 6 shows a measurement circuit 603 which is coupled to the control pin of the power switch 106 and which is configured to detect voltage oscillations at the control pin. At the time instant subsequent to the second pulse duration (i.e. subsequent to the generation of the pulsed off-signal), the oscillations 316 of the voltage at the control pin of the power switch 106 may be indicative of free-wheeling of the inductor 103. As such, the measurement circuit 603 may be configured to measure free-wheeling of the inductor 103 at the control pin (e.g. the gate) of the power switch 106.

As such, a power converter 100, 400 is described which is configured to provide electrical energy at an output voltage 115 derived from electrical energy at an input voltage 101. The power converter 100, 400 may comprise the power switch 106 configured to commutate between an on-state and an off-state. Furthermore, the power converter may comprise a control circuit configured to control the switching state of the power switch 106. In addition, the power converter may comprise an inductor 103 configured to store electrical energy, when the power switch 106 is in on-state, and configured to release electrical energy, when the power switch 106 is in off-state.

The control circuit may be configured to control the switching state of the power switch 106 via a source of the power switch 106 (as outlined e.g. in the context of FIGS. 1 and 4) or the control circuit may be configured to control the switching state of the power switch 106 via a gate of the power switch 106 (as outlined e.g. in the context of FIG. 6). As such, the control circuit may comprise the high side control switch 601 and the low side control switch 602.

The power converter may further comprise free-wheeling sensing means, such as the measurement circuit 603 shown in FIG. 6. The free-wheeling sensing means (notably the measurement circuit 603) may be configured to detect an oscillation of a voltage at a gate of the power switch 106 (see e.g. FIG. 6) or at a source of the power switch 106. The control circuit may be configured to control the switching state of the

15

power switch based on the detected oscillation. In particular, the control circuit may be configured to control the power converter in a boundary conduction mode.

In the present document, circuit arrangements have been described which allow for the re-charging of the supply voltage Vcc of a driver circuit using the electrical power provided within a power converter itself. Furthermore, the circuit arrangements may be used to measure “free-wheeling” of an inductor of the power converter at the level of the supply voltage Vcc.

Particular aspects of the present patent application are:

Aspect 1) A control circuit configured to re-charge supply voltage provisioning means (114) and configured to control the switching state of a power switch (106); wherein the supply voltage provisioning means (114) are configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of the power switch (106); the control circuit comprising

a control switch (107) configured to

couple an output of the power switch (106) to ground, when an input of the control switch (107) is coupled to the output of the power switch (106), to put the power switch (106) to an on-state; and

decouple the output of the power switch (106) from ground, to put the power switch (106) to an off-state; and

charging circuitry (109, 111) configured to enable a charging current flowing from the output of the power switch (106) to the supply voltage provisioning means (114) and configured to disable a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means (114) to the output of the power switch (106), when an input of the charging circuitry (109, 111) is coupled to the output of the power switch (106) and when an output of the charging circuitry (109, 111) is coupled to the gate of the power switch (106) and to the supply voltage provisioning means (114); wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through an input-to-output capacitance (104) arranged between an input and the output of the power switch (106).

Aspect 2) The control circuit of aspect 1, wherein the charging circuitry (109, 111) comprises a charging diode (109) configured to let pass the charging current from the output of the power switch (106) to the supply voltage provisioning means (114) and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means (114) to the output of the power switch (106).

Aspect 3) The control circuit of any previous aspect, wherein the charging circuitry (109, 111) comprises

a first charging switch (111) configured to block and/or to let pass a current between the supply voltage provisioning means (114) to the output of the power switch (106); and

first control means configured to open and/or close the first charging switch (111) in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means (114).

Aspect 4) The control circuit of any previous aspect, further comprising a first charging capacitor (104) arranged in parallel to a drain-source capacitance of the power switch (106) and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the input of the power switch (106).

Aspect 5) The control circuit of aspect 4, further comprising a Zener diode (105) configured to couple the first charging capacitor (104) to ground.

16

Aspect 6) The control circuit of any previous aspect, further comprising

a second charging capacitor (404) arranged in parallel to the serially arranged power switch (106) and charging circuitry (109, 111) and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the input of the power switch (106); and

a second charging diode (409) configured to let pass a second charging current from the second charging capacitor (404) to the supply voltage provisioning means (114) and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means (114) to the second charging capacitor (404).

Aspect 7) The control circuit of aspect 6, further comprising a second charging switch (411) configured to couple the charging capacitor (404) to ground, when the second charging switch (411) is in on-state.

second control means configured to open and/or close the second charging switch (411) in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means (114).

Aspect 8) A power converter (100, 400) configured to provide electrical energy at an output voltage (115) derived from electrical energy at an input voltage (101); wherein the power converter (100, 400) comprises

a power switch (106) configured to commutate between an on-state and an off-state;

a control circuit according to any of aspects 1 to 7, configured to control the switching state of the power switch (106); and

an inductor (103) configured to store electrical energy, when the power switch (106) is in on-state, and configured to release electrical energy, when the power switch (106) is in off-state.

Aspect 9) The power converter (100, 400) of aspect 8, further comprising free-wheeling sensing means configured to detect an oscillation of a voltage at

a gate of the power switch (106);

a gate of the control switch (107); and/or

a drain of the control switch (107).

Aspect 10) The power converter (100, 400) of aspect 9, wherein the control circuit is configured to control the switching state of the power switch (106) based on the detected oscillation.

Aspect 11) The power converter (100, 400) of aspect 10, wherein the control circuit is configured to control the power converter (100, 400) in a boundary conduction mode.

Aspect 12) The power converter (100, 400) of any of aspects 8 to 11, wherein the power switch (106) and/or the control switch (107) comprise one or more of

a metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor;

a drain-source capacitance; and/or

a source-gate capacitance.

Aspect 13) The power converter (100, 400) of any of aspects 8 to 12, wherein the power converter (100, 400) comprises one or more of: a buck converter, a boost converter, a buck-boost converter, a flyback converter, and/or a single-ended primary-inductor converter.

Aspect 14) A driver circuit for a solid state lighting device, the driver circuit comprising

a rectifier configured to provide a DC voltage from an AC mains voltage; and

a power converter according to any of aspects 8 to 13, configured to provide a drive current at a drive voltage for the solid state lighting device, derived from electrical energy at the DC voltage.

17

Aspect 15) A method (500) for re-charging supply voltage provisioning means (114) and for controlling the switching state of a power switch (106); wherein the supply voltage provisioning means (114) are configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of the power switch (106); the method (500) comprising

coupling (501) an output of the power switch (106) to ground using a control switch (107), to put the power switch (106) to an on-state; and

decoupling (502) the output of the power switch (106) from ground using the control switch (107), to put the power switch (106) to an off-state;

enabling (503) a charging current flowing from the output of the power switch (106) to the supply voltage provisioning means (114); and

disabling (504) a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means (114) to the output of the power switch (106); wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through an input-to-output capacitance (104) arranged between an input and the output of the power switch (106).

It should be noted that the description and drawings merely illustrate the principles of the proposed methods and systems. Those skilled in the art will be able to implement various arrangements that, although not explicitly described or shown herein, embody the principles of the invention and are included within its spirit and scope. Furthermore, all examples and embodiment outlined in the present document are principally intended expressly to be only for explanatory purposes to help the reader in understanding the principles of the proposed methods and systems. Furthermore, all statements herein providing principles, aspects, and embodiments of the invention, as well as specific examples thereof, are intended to encompass equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A control circuit configured to control a switching state of a power switch; wherein a first port of the power switch is coupled to an inductor; wherein
 - the control circuit is configured to be coupled to a control port of the power switch; wherein the control port of the power switch is different from the first port of the power switch;
 - the control circuit comprises a control unit configured to generate a control signal for controlling the switching state of the power switch; wherein the control signal is to be provided to the control port of the power switch; and
 - the control circuit comprises free-wheeling sensing means configured to detect a change of a voltage at a measurement port of the power switch; wherein the measurement port of the power switch is different from the first port of the power switch; and wherein the change of the voltage at the measurement port is indicative of free-wheeling of the inductor.
2. The control circuit of claim 1, the control circuit is configured to control the switching state of the power switch based on the detected change of the voltage at the measurement port.
3. The control circuit of claim 1, wherein
 - the control port and the measurement port correspond to a gate of the power switch;
 - the control circuit comprises a low side control switch coupled to the gate of the power switch and configured to generate a pulsed off-signal by coupling the gate of the power switch to ground for a pulse duration and configured to put the power switch to the off-state; wherein the

18

gate of the power switch is floating between an end of the pulsed off-signal and a beginning of the subsequence pulsed on-signal; and

the free-wheeling sensing means are configured to detect the change of the voltage at the gate of the power switch when the gate of the power switch is floating.

4. The control circuit of claim 1, wherein the control port corresponds to a source of the power switch;

the control circuit comprises a control switch configured to couple the source of the power switch to ground, when an input of the control switch is coupled to the source of the power switch, to put the power switch to an on-state; and

decouple the source of the power switch from ground, to put the power switch to an off-state; and

the free-wheeling sensing means are configured to detect a change of a voltage at a gate or at the source of the power switch, when the power switch is in the off-state.

5. The control circuit of claim 1, further comprising a first charging capacitor arranged in parallel to a drain-source capacitance of the power switch and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the first port of the power switch.

6. The control circuit of claim 5, further comprising a Zener diode configured to couple the first charging capacitor to ground.

7. The control circuit of claim 4, further comprising supply voltage provisioning means configured to provide a supply voltage to the gate of the power switch;

charging circuitry configured to enable a charging current flowing from the source of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to disable a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means to the source of the power switch, when an input of the charging circuitry is coupled to the source of the power switch and when an output of the charging circuitry is coupled to the gate of the power switch and to the supply voltage provisioning means; wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through a drain-to-source capacitance arranged between a drain and the source of the power switch.

8. The control circuit of claim 7, wherein the charging circuitry comprises a charging diode configured to let pass the charging current from the source of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the source of the power switch.

9. The control circuit of claim 7, wherein the charging circuitry comprises

a first charging switch configured to block and/or to let pass a current between the supply voltage provisioning means to the source of the power switch; and

first control means configured to open and/or close the first charging switch in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means.

10. The control circuit of claim 7, further comprising a second charging capacitor arranged in parallel to the serially arranged power switch and charging circuitry and configured to provide a current, subject to a change of a voltage at the drain of the power switch; and

a second charging diode configured to let pass a second charging current from the second charging capacitor to the supply voltage provisioning means and configured to block the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the second charging capacitor.

19

11. The control circuit of claim 10, further comprising a second charging switch configured to couple the charging capacitor to ground, when the second charging switch is in on-state; and
 second control means configured to open and/or close the second charging switch in dependence of the supply voltage provided by the supply voltage provisioning means.
12. A power converter configured to provide electrical energy at an output voltage derived from electrical energy at an input voltage; wherein the power converter comprises
 a power switch configured to commutate between an on-state and an off-state;
 a control circuit according to claim 1, configured to control the switching state of the power switch and configured to detect a change of a voltage at the measurement port of the power switch; and
 an inductor configured to store electrical energy, when the power switch is in on-state, and configured to release electrical energy, when the power switch is in off-state.
13. The power converter of claim 12, wherein the control circuit is configured to control the power converter in a boundary conduction mode based on the detected change of the voltage at the measurement port.
14. A driver circuit for a solid state lighting device, the driver circuit comprising
 a rectifier configured to provide a DC voltage from an AC mains voltage; and
 a power converter according to claim 12, configured to provide a drive current at a drive voltage for the solid state lighting device, derived from electrical energy at the DC voltage.
15. A method for re-charging supply voltage provisioning means and for controlling the switching state of a power switch, the method comprising the steps of:
 providing the supply voltage provisioning means configured to provide a supply voltage to a gate of a power switch;
 coupling an output of the power switch to ground using a control switch, to put the power switch to an on-state;
 decoupling the output of the power switch from ground using the control switch, to put the power switch to an off-state;

20

- enabling a charging current flowing from the output of the power switch to the supply voltage provisioning means; and
 disabling a current flowing from the supply voltage provisioning means to the output of the power switch; wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through an input-to-output capacitance arranged between an input and the output of the power switch.
16. The method of claim 15, wherein a source of the power switch is the output of the power switch.
17. The method of claim 15, wherein the charging current is derived from a current flowing through a drain-to-source capacitance arranged between a drain and a source of the power switch.
18. The method of claim 17, wherein the charging current is enabled during a transition from an on-state to an off-state of the power switch.
19. The method of claim 17, wherein the charging current is enabled during a time interval within which a voltage change at the drain of the power switch exhibits a gradient which is equal to or greater than a pre-determined gradient threshold.
20. The method of claim 15, wherein the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the source of the power switch is disabled at any time.
21. The method of claim 15, wherein the current from the supply voltage provisioning means to the source of the power switch is disabled at any time.
22. The method of claim 15, wherein free-wheeling of a power converter is measured using coupling provided by a drain-to-gate capacitance, a gate-to-source capacitance and/or a drain-to-source capacitance of the power switch.
23. The method of claim 22, wherein the measurement point is the gate of the power switch.
24. The method of claim 23, wherein the free-wheeling is measured at the gate of the power switch wherein a measurement circuit measures oscillations at the gate of the power switch while the power switch is in the off-state.

* * * * *